5: Pollard M-5 (no date) 1921 AE4 Lolo AE4

CHAPTER XVIII

ON THE MARCH AGAIN

ON the morning when we left See-tieh we were up soon after six o'clock. It had snowed a good bit during the night. Some of the snow had come through the boards of the roof and fallen on to my bed. I had covered myself with all that I had, and had crept right down under all, but I found it very cold in spite of these precautions. We found that the snow on the ground was not so deep as we had feared it would have been, and we were not prevented from proceeding on our journey still farther into Nosuland.

In preparation for our journey, the friends at the farmstead had cooked a lot of maize cakes for us to take on the road. We were very glad indeed to have these provisions, for that day we had to walk twenty miles in the snow, and there was no chance of a meal till late.

As we were travelling along and I remarked that I was getting hungry Mr Long told me that I ought to imitate the bears and lick my paws. Black bears are very common in Nosuland, and in the winter, when they hibernate in the caves, the people say that they keep off the hunger of the long months by licking their paws. For this reason the Chinese associate great virtue with these paws, and pay high prices for them. They are used as a special dish in their high-class feasts.

Soon after we got away from See-tieh we passed a small village, where lived one of Ah-pooh's grandsons. In the front of his house, out in the open field, was a sight which in Chinese

5: Pollard M-5 (no date) 1921 AE4 Lolo AE4

[251] 685 Yunnan would have been deemed marvellous. Stored on a platform in the centre of the field was a great quantity of ripe Indian corn. I asked whether anyone kept watch over it at night, and was told, "No." They said that no one would steal in these parts. The Nosu steal from their enemies or from strangers, never from their own people, and never at all without the permission of their overlord. I expect the latter permission is as easily obtained as were letters of marque in the times of the great English naval wars with 000 France and Spain. Such an exposed quantity of grain would not have remained intact a single night in Chinese Yunnan. The farmers there have frequently to guard their crops, night and day, with weapons of some kind or other. In some places it is one great fight, first to get the grain, and then to keep it. In places, when the maize seed has been sown wild pigs will come by night and root it all up again. When the young corn appears above the ground neighbours' cattle or rich men's horses will come and do great damage. When the cobs are on the stalks the enemies become more numerous than ever. Wild pigs, household dogs, porcupines, monkeys, bears, rats, all have sweet teeth for the young maize cobs. And when the grain is nearly ripe, and almost ready for gathering in, thieves constantly come and steal right and left. Sometimes, if it is a very rainy night and the watchers seek the shelter of the little huts built on the banks overlooking the fields, some bold thieves will brave the elements and carry off many baskets full of the ripening corn. Even after the grain is stored in the house thieves are still daring and plentiful, and landlords who are paid in grain often take so much that there are only half-meals left for the tillers of the soil during the rest of the year.

5: Pollard M-5 (no date) 1921 AE4 Lolo AE4

of the wizards. The wizards proceed to deal with the trouble as follows. A lucky day is first chosen. When that arrives, two long poles are placed on the ground, and a ladder of swords is made by tying thirty-six swords crosswise to these poles. The village folk, by means of ropes, pull this ladder of swords upright. The wizard then seizes a fowl, goes through his incantations, and then, with naked feet, walks up the ladder, treading on the edges of the blades as he goes. The fowl is let off from the top of the ladder, and it is unlucky for anyone with whom it comes in contact as it is falling down. The wizard then returns down the ladder, still walking the swords. He further shows his power by dancing on red-hot ploughshares.

This sword-ladder business is part of the magical stock in trade of some Taoists in other parts of China. It would be a surprise if it were discovered that the origin of many of the magical arts of the Taoists was among the Nosu of West China.

The second story is interesting, as it agrees with a story told me by a Black Blood Nosu while we were at Mr Long's, waiting to cross over into Nosuland. The story describes how the Nosu punish thieves by burning them alive. The Black Blood at Mr Long's told us that at his village a slave, after the death of his master, turned robber. One night he set fire to a house, and was caught red-handed. His arms and legs were broken immediately, so that he could not escape. Then it was decided to burn him publicly. It was at first proposed to burn him on the public road, but then there was a fear that his spirit might haunt those who used the road. So it was finally agreed to burn him at the grave of his grandparent. Three hundred families joined in the

5: Pollard M-5 (no date) 1921 AE4 Lolo AE4

685 burning, each bringing a quota of firewood. The robber was first given a good meal of rice and wine, and then he was placed on the top of the fire. He was kept in position by means of spear and trident. In half-an-hour the robber was consumed, and a grave was built up over the ashes. There was a lot of trouble before this affair was settled, and the man who told me the story, the chief mover in the burning, had to pay up well before the relatives of the burnt man let the matter drop. I have been shown places where thieves have been lynched in this summary manner.

One can easily see how the strangeness of the customs of the aboriginals has aroused the curiosity of the Chinese, and in many cases brought on their ridicule. If the Chinese would only study the best side of the tribes-folk they might be willing to appreciate these people and to draw them into the common band of patriotic members of this great country. The strong spirit which moves the Nosu and other tribes of West China would be a valuable addition to the life of China.